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October 3, 2008

The Honorable Condoleezza Rice  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Rice,

As a member of the Congressional Hellenic Caucus and the Representative of a district with a large Greek community, I am writing on behalf of my constituents to express our concerns about the antagonistic stance Turkey has taken towards its Mediterranean neighbor, the Hellenic Republic of Greece. I ask that the State Department increase its efforts to urge the government of Turkey to discontinue human rights violations, refrain from religious discrimination, and avoid further intrusions into Greek airspace.

Turkey has applied to enter the European Union (EU), but the government has failed to affirm basic human rights affirmed by the EU. A recent study conducted by the Austrian Institute for International Affairs, found that Turkey is far outside the EU mainstream on human rights matters. While Turkey claims to have a zero-tolerance policy against torturing prisoners, the government has been slow to punish offenders. Amnesty International recently released a report showing that human rights in Turkey declined last year. Torture, unfair trials, and a lack of freedom of speech were among the abuses cited. The report also showed that government officials could have done more to prevent the murder of journalist Hrant Dink in 2007.

In addition, Turkey has failed to denounce the persecution of Christians. Priests and clergymen in Turkey have been the subjects of abuse in recent months. Recently, after almost a year of dragging their feet, the Third Criminal Court of the city of Malatya began the trial of the five men arrested in connection with the abduction, torture, and murder of three Christian missionaries. Chilling testimony revealed that Turkish security forces had been monitoring the activities and whereabouts of the three victims in the weeks leading up to the attack. While complicity has not been demonstrated, this tragic event further proves that the Turkish government is unable or unwilling to protect the rights of citizens who subscribe to minority religions.

Furthermore, Turkey has continued to discriminate against various religious sects. In my view, this lamentable situation is the result of certain inappropriate practices of the Turkish government. I am especially concerned about three aspects of Turkish government policy towards its citizens who are Greek Orthodox – practices which threaten the viability of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The first of these is Turkey's

longstanding unwillingness to recognize the Ecumenical Patriarchate as ecumenical – that is, trans-national. The entire world outside of Turkey—Orthodox and non-Orthodox—recognizes the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate in Istanbul as the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Its Ecumenical nature derives from its history and spiritual stature as well the faith and perceptions of people around the globe.

Second, I am deeply concerned by Turkey's continued involvement in the process of selecting the Ecumenical Patriarch and by its continued insistence that he be a Turkish citizen. These practices clearly reflect a policy of viewing the Ecumenical Patriarchate as a strictly Turkish institution, when in fact it provides spiritual and moral guidance for millions of believers worldwide. Today, there are less than 2,500 Greek Orthodox citizens of Turkey, most of whom are elderly. Accordingly, under present policies, there soon will be virtually no Greek Orthodox citizens of Turkey left to qualify as Ecumenical Patriarch.

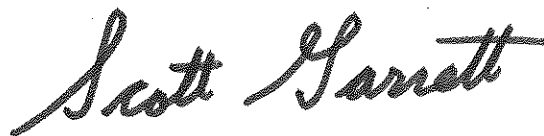
Third, in 1971, the Turkish government closed all university-level non-Muslim religious schools. In order to reopen, a university may accept only Turkish citizens as students. The new regulation has made it impossible for the Halki Monastery, the primary Greek Orthodox seminary in Turkey, to renew its courses. Since Turkey also requires all religious leaders to be trained in Turkey, there will eventually be no one qualified to lead the Greek Orthodox community in Turkey.

Fourth, Turkey's expropriations of lands belonging to the Ecumenical Patriarchate—as a result of a policy in which the state takes possession of lands not being directly used by the Ecumenical Patriarchate and of lands of those who emigrated or died without heirs—is very worrisome. This policy deprives the Ecumenical Patriarchate of both badly needed funds and cultural patrimony.

Finally, Greek authorities said Turkish military aircraft violated Greek airspace over the Aegean at least seven times last year. Encroaching on Greek airspace is a clear violation of international law and Turkey should cease further infractions in order to maintain friendly relations with its neighbors.

I hope the Administration will encourage Turkey to improve its human rights record and cease airspace violations. The people of Turkey should have the freedom to worship without fear of retaliation, and the Turkish government should refrain from entering Greek airspace without reason.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Scott Garrett". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "S".

Scott Garrett